



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CHICKENS TEST POSITIVE FOR WESTERN EQUINE ENCEPHALITIS

Mosquito Borne Virus Detected Near Buena Vista Lagoon

County Environmental Health officials announced today that two chickens tested positive for Western Equine Encephalitis (WEE). These birds are part of Vector Control's sentinel chicken flock located in the Buena Vista Lagoon area.

As part of its disease surveillance program, which aids in early detection of mosquito-borne encephalitis viruses, the County maintains three sentinel chicken flocks, with ten birds each, near key mosquito-breeding areas. Blood samples are taken biweekly from these chickens and tested for WEE, West Nile Virus and St. Louis Encephalitis. In its normal transmission cycle, Western Equine Encephalitis usually involves birds and mosquitoes, but is rarely transmitted by infected mosquitoes to horses and humans.

Fifth District Supervisor Bill Horn praised the County's early detection program. "Our Vector Control program is constantly on the lookout for diseases that mosquitoes may carry to humans," Horn states. "We need the public to be vigilant and notify the Vector Control immediately about dead birds that may be infected." Dead birds can be reported to Vector Control by calling (858) 694-2888.

In September this year testing revealed that mosquitoes from Penasquitos Lagoon were positive for WEE. The last human case of WEE in San Diego County was reported in 1965; no horse cases have ever been reported in the County. Since 1964, a total of 639 human cases have been confirmed in the United States. Most individuals who become infected with WEE do not show signs of illness. Of those who become ill, most develop mild illness, which includes flu-like symptoms such as fever, headache, and body aches. Children, particularly those under one year of age, are more likely to become severely ill than adults. Symptoms usually appear in 5 to 15 days after infection. While the risk of people becoming seriously ill from a mosquito infected with WEE is low, if you suspect WEE or similar illness, please contact your health care provider for proper diagnosis and treatment. Currently there is a vaccine available only for horses.

People can protect themselves from acquiring this virus by taking the same precautions recommended for West Nile virus. Stay inside when mosquitoes are most active, especially at dawn or dusk, wear long sleeves and pants when outdoors. When you must be outside use an insect repellent containing DEET (follow product instructions carefully and consult your doctor if you have questions or concerns). For more information about the WEE or West Nile virus, call the County's West Nile virus information line at 1-888-551-INFO (4636) or visit the official County West Nile virus website at www.SDFightTheBite.com.

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